

VZCZCXRO9592
PP RUEHAG RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHKUK RUEHROV
DE RUEHLB #1116/01 2121627
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 301627Z JUL 08
FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2617
INFO RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE
RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 2673
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO 2939
RHMFISS/CDR USCENCOM MACDILL AFB FL
RHEHAAA/NSC WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIRUT 001116

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR NEA/FO, NEA/ELA
ALSO FOR IO A/S SILVERBERG AND PDAS WARLICK
USUN FOR KHALILZAD/WOLFF/KUMAR
NSC FOR ABRAMS/SINGH/YERGER/GAVITO

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/28/2018
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [PINR](#) [SY](#) [LE](#)
SUBJECT: LEBANON: JUMBLATT MAY MAKE A DEAL WITH DRUZE
RIVAL, SAYS ARSLAN ADVISOR

REF: A. BEIRUT 726
[B](#). BEIRUT 1041
[C](#). BEIRUT 1103

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires a.i. William K. Grant for reasons 1.4
(b) and (d).

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (C) Saleem Hamadeh, advisor to opposition Druze leader and Youth and Sports Minister Talal Arslan, predicted that Arslan's rival Druze leader Walid Jumblatt would make a deal with Arslan in order to maximize the number of seats he could win in the 2009 parliamentary elections. Hamadeh did not believe Jumblatt would leave the March 14 alliance, but instead would negotiate solely for the elections. Jumblatt is also interested in improving his relations with Syria, Hamadeh interpreted, out of fear for his life. Hamadeh, who recently accompanied Arslan to a meeting with Hizballah SYG Hassan Nasrallah, relayed that Nasrallah is urging recently released Lebanese prisoner Samir Kantar to run in the parliamentary elections. End summary.

JUMBLATT TO MAKE A
DEAL WITH ARSLAN?

[1](#)2. (C) Saleem Hamadeh, advisor to opposition Druze leader and Youth and Sports Minister Talal Arslan, predicted to PolOff in a July 29 meeting that Arslan's rival Druze leader Walid Jumblatt would make a deal with Arslan in order to maximize the number of seats he could win in the 2009 parliamentary elections. Hamadeh confided that Arslan and Jumblatt have been meeting regularly, with the last meeting taking place only days earlier. Hamadeh reported that the two rivals have not yet begun discussing parliamentary elections, as they are focused on working through what transpired in the Druze homeland, the Chouf mountains, during the May clashes (Ref A).

[1](#)3. (C) Hamadeh asserted that while Jumblatt's party could expect to win all of the seats in the Chouf, the nearby Baabda and Aley districts are not guaranteed for Jumblatt. He warned that if Jumblatt attempted to take on Arslan and the opposition in the elections, he would likely lose the Baabda district and win a total of perhaps 13 seats. However, Hamadeh estimated, if Jumblatt were to make an agreement with Arslan, he could expect to win more than 13 seats.

¶4. (C) Hamadeh predicted that Jumblatt would pursue this path, adding that for Jumblatt, it would be a tactical decision based on self-interest, rather than one based on principles. Hamadeh stressed that such an agreement with Arslan would not mean that Jumblatt would part with the March 14 alliance; rather, the agreement would solely be concerned with the elections.

¶5. (C) Hamadeh deduced that Jumblatt is open to this arrangement because he fears for his life and therefore wants a relationship with Syria, especially given that the U.S. did not heed his May call for a regime change in Syria. Relaying a meeting he had in the past year with a General in Syria, Mohammed Nassif, Hamadeh said that the Syrians are very upset with Jumblatt. Nassif reportedly said, "Evil will have an easier time getting into heaven than Jumblatt will be allowed in Syria."

ARSLAN NOT MARRIED
TO HIZBALLAH

¶6. (C) Listing his objections to Hizballah's principles, Hamadeh hinted that Arslan would eventually break with Hizballah, but not before the 2009 elections. He insisted that resolution of Sheba'a Farms would eliminate a key raison d'etre for Hizballah.

RELEASED LEBANESE PRISONER
KANTAR MAY RUN FOR MP SEAT

BEIRUT 00001116 002 OF 002

¶7. (C) When PolOff expressed disappointment at the remarks made by recently released Lebanese prisoner Samir Kantar (Ref B) against Ambassador Sison at an event hosted by Arslan, Hamadeh stressed that Arslan did not anticipate or endorse Kantar's comments.

¶8. (C) Hamadeh said that Hizballah SYG Hassan Nasrallah is urging Kantar to run for a parliamentary seat. According to Hamadeh, Kantar is reluctant because "he wants to keep fighting." Hamadeh reasoned that Nasrallah is hoping Kantar can capitalize on the popular support he currently enjoys.

COMMENT

¶9. (C) It is very conceivable that Jumblatt would make such an election-focused deal with his Druze rival. We have already heard how Jumblatt's representative in the ministerial statement drafting committee has tried to be accommodating to the opposition (Ref C). Hamadeh clearly was trying to influence U.S. thinking by strategizing how an agreement between the Druze rivals would benefit Jumblatt, seen as a U.S. ally. We believe he was lobbying for U.S. support for such an arrangement. End comment.
GRANT